

What Is Locally Led Conservation?

REFERENCE SHEET

MONTANA

"Locally Led Conservation is local people, with leadership from Conservation Districts; who assess natural resource conditions and needs; set goals; identify programs and other resources needed to solve these goals; develop proposals and recommendations; implement solutions; and measure their success."

Locally Led Conservation Principles

- Based on the principle that community members are best suited to identify and resolve natural resource problems
- Dovetails with Conservation District legal authorities, responsibilities, annual and long range planning
- Conservation Districts should be the primary facilitator
- Is timeless - no deadline for completion, is on-going, is not tied to any particular year, but evaluated regularly
- Is natural resource driven, not program driven
- Focused on voluntary, non-regulatory, incentive based approaches before use of regulatory measures
- Involves the community in the assessment of natural resource needs, solutions of problems, and determination of priorities
- Address all natural resource issues
- Uses a mix of federal, state, local, and private sector programs as tools to solve natural resource concerns
- Is strongly supported by the Conservation Partnership
- Is a way of doing business, not a process or program

What Does Local Mean?

Local can mean a county, a portion of a county, a watershed, a multi-county region, or whatever geographic area is best suited to address resource conservation needs identified.

Local Work Group

A "Local Work Group" should be made up of representation from a wide range of local citizens, agency staff, and private businesses. The local conservation district should provide leadership in organizing the work group. The work group is an important element of the locally led conservation way of doing business.

A good meeting plan and effective facilitation is important for local group formation and operation. Contact your state conservation partnership leaders if you need assistance.

Steps

- Obtain public participation
- Assess conservation needs
- Identify and prioritize needs
- Set goals
- Identify programs and funding sources
- Develop area wide conservation plan
- Implementation plan
- Measure performance

Obtain Public Participation

An essential step in locally led conservation is the input from a broad range of individuals, agencies, organizations, and businesses. Their input is valuable because of their interest in and familiarity with local resource needs and conditions. It is important to invite public participation in your area for identification and inventorying natural resource issues, planning, implementation activities and evaluation.

The CTIC "Know Your Watershed" office and NACD's Capacity Building Service Center have references on public participation techniques to share. The NRCS Social Sciences Institute has developed a set of tools to assist with community involvement. "Know Your Watershed" and Capacity Building offices have tools on public participation to share also.

Assess Conservation Needs

The conservation needs assessment is a comprehensive evaluation of the condition of an area's natural resource base. It should take into account the entire spectrum of natural resources and their relationship to the principal land uses in the area.

The Conservation Needs Assessment will serve as a platform for making decisions about local priorities and policies for conservation programs that are delivered locally. It can also recognize various local, state, and federal laws and regulations that may influence how a conservation need is addressed.

Results from the public participation activity can be combined with existing information/data to complete a conservation needs assessment. Examples of information/data include:

- Conservation District Long Range Plan
 - County and State natural resource inventories and data
 - National Resources Inventory - NRCS
 - National Planning Procedures Handbook - NRCS
 - National Strategic Plan and Regional Strategic Plans - NRCS and others
 - Resource Conservation Act assessments - NRCS
 - NRCS State of the Land Information website -
<http://www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/land/home.html>
 - EPA Watershed Index website - <http://www.epa.gov/surf/IWI/>
 - National Watershed Network website -
<http://www.ctic.purdue.edu/gistitle.html>
 - Know Your Watershed website -
<http://www.ctic.purdue.edu/kyw/KYWMain2.html>
 - USGS Water Resources websites - <http://water.usgs.gov/lookup/getlist>
<http://h2o.usgs.gov>
<http://water.usgs.gov/public/GIS/huc.html>
 - Forest Inventory and Assessment - USFS/State Forestry - <http://fsweb.wo.fed.us>
 - FWS Homepage and National Wetlands Inventory website -
<http://www.fws.gov/>
<http://www.nwi.fws.gov/>
 - EPA Surf Your Watershed website - <http://www.epa.gov/surf/surf98/maplib.htm>
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Identify and Prioritize Needs

Once specific resource concerns are identified, the local group should identify the local resource priorities and geographic areas of concern. Public input and resource data will be the tools to establish these priorities. Groups should also consider gathering input from their elected officials if it is not received during the public participation process.

Set Goals

With the resource needs prioritized and geographic areas of concern identified, measurable goals and objectives should be identified locally. Identifying local priorities and setting conservation goals can be key factors in determining state and national priority areas and program goals.

Identify Programs and Funding Sources

With goals and objectives identified, the local group can look at all the different conservation programs that are available and make recommendations on how these programs should operate within the local community.

Share your goals with all potential funding organizations, including county, state and city governments, grants and loan sources. Each program considered will have different guidelines for how to make recommendations and apply for funding projects. For example, USDA program proposals and recommendations may need to be advanced by an authorized entity serving on the local work group to be in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

The recommendations will help guide, coordinate and integrate local, state and national and private conservation efforts and could address programs such as:

- Farm Bill (CRP, EQIP, WRP, CFO and other) through a qualified USDA organization
 - Clean Water Act (319 projects, TMDL activities, other)
 - Endangered Species Act
 - Forestry (Forest legacy, Forest Stewardship, other)
 - State Soil and Water Conservation Programs
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Develop Area Wide Conservation Plan

An area wide conservation plan should be developed that brings together the elements identified in the previous steps. The area wide plan should include: the identified natural resource priorities, geographic areas of concern, community needs and concerns, measurable goals and objectives, technology needed, programs and services to be utilized, needed programs or processes, actions needed, individuals responsible, and time table for completing actions, at a minimum.

Implement Plan

Locally led conservation implementation requires the coordination of work, constant monitoring of implementation activities, leadership, willingness to share funding and people, and consistent support from decision makers to be successful.

Measure Performance

Locally led conservation does not end when the area wide plan has been implemented. The effectiveness of the effort should be continuously evaluated to ensure that identified community goals and objectives are achieved.

This paper is meant to assist you with local conservation efforts. Additional assistance including reference materia, state example, and guidelines are available from the Locally Led Conservation National Support Team. Contact Ray Ledgerwood, Director Capacity Building Services, NACD, NE 1615 Eastgate Blvd., Pullman, WA 99163, telephone 509.334.1823, fax 509.334.3453, or Ron Lauster, Conservation Planning Team Leader, NRCS, PO Box 2890, Washington, DC 20013, telephone 202.720.1841 for information or assistance.

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